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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000554

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NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [KMPI](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT ELECTION-EVE REPORT

REF: A. 06 KUWAIT 2446 B. KUWAIT 410 C. KUWAIT 411 D.
KUWAIT 471

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. SUMMARY: Despite the suspension of all election-related activities due to the recent death of the former Amir, voting will still take place on May 17. The total number of candidates running for Parliament now stands at 274, including 27 women. Based on polls and visible trends, the new Parliament may be similar in composition to the previous one, further extending the poisonous relationship between the legislative and executive branches government. Women are hoping to win a seat for the first time in this election and Shi'a are hoping to increase their numbers in Parliament due to the demographic leverage they now have with the new five constituency electoral system. It is difficult to predict, however, how the new system will affect the outcome of the elections. As in 2006, corruption and women's issues top the campaign agenda. Results are expected to be announced on/around May 18, at which time the Cabinet will resign and assume the role of caretaker government until a new Cabinet is appointed and sworn in by the Amir. The new Parliament will convene 14 days after the declaration of results. END SUMMARY.

NO ELECTION ACTIVITIES IN THE 3 DAY LEAD-UP TO ELECTIONS

12. (U) Due to the death of former Amir Shaykh Saad Abdullah Al Sabah on May 13, a three-day mourning period is in effect May 14 - 16, the days immediately leading up to election day. However, according to the GOK, elections will be held as scheduled on May 17. All election-related activities have been suspended during the mourning period.

13. (U) BIO NOTE: Shaykh Saad Abdullah Al Sabah succeeded the previous Amir, Shaykh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al Sabah following his death in 2006. Shaykh Saad served only nine days as Amir and was deposed by Parliament due to poor health shortly before an official letter of abdication was received. Shaykh Saad served as Crown of Prince of Kuwait from 1977 - 2006 and as Prime Minister from 1977 - 2003. Shaykh Saad was also credited with playing a major role in the reconstruction of Kuwait following its liberation in 1991. END BIO NOTE.

CANDIDATES AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

14. (C) The final tally of candidates running for the 50 seats in Parliament is 274, including 27 women. Polling data from early May suggests that 33 of the 50 new members of parliament (MP) will be members of the old Parliament re-elected under the new system. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the previous Parliament, a short five-week campaign period and a new law prohibiting the use of banners, posters and flyers on public property, have voter support trending towards those with already established public profiles. Some suggest voters will continue to vote

along tribal/familial lines and that membership in a prominent family is a standard qualification for election to Parliament. However, according to other pundits, the new system increases the chances for previously unknown candidates to win seats, which has resulted in an increase in the number of younger, well-qualified candidates running in this election.

15. (C) Both women (who won the right to vote and run for office in 2005) and Shi'a (who represent an estimated 30 percent of the Kuwaiti population) are hoping to make gains in this election. No women candidates won a seat in the 2006 elections, but hopes are rife for better results this year. Former candidate and Middle East Partnership Initiative grantee, Dr. Rola Dashti is polling highest of all women candidates and many are optimistic she will be the first female MP. A newcomer to the political scene, Dr. Aseel Al-Awadi, the only woman to run on a ticket with men, is another leading female candidate. There does appear to be a correlation between Awadi's strength as a candidate and the fact that she is part of an organized electoral movement running on a ticket with male candidates. The Shi'a stand to make gains in this election based on a few factors including demographic leverage based on the new electoral system of five constituencies compared to the previous 25 constituencies and that they will likely vote along increased sectarian lines (as opposed to past elections) due to recent sectarian tensions, sparked in part by public eulogies offered for slain terrorist Imad Mugniyah (Ref D).

CENTRAL ISSUES AND PREDICTED OUTCOMES

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16. (C) Similar to the 2006 parliamentary elections (Ref A), corruption and women's issues top all candidates' agendas. With women accounting for 55 percent of voters, all candidates, regardless of affiliation, are paying special attention to their female constituents with many setting aside time and events specifically for women. In addition, the awareness demonstrated by the female voting bloc during this election season appears to be much higher than two years ago when they were voting and running for office for the first time. Additional issues of importance include education, health-care and resolution of government-parliament tensions. The "youth vote", i.e. between the ages of 21 - 35, is not expected to have much impact, despite their own high interest in U.S. elections and their own successful 2006 blog campaign for re-districting.

17. (C) It is difficult to predict what effect the new five constituency system (Ref C) will have on the outcome of the elections. Some analysts suggest real change will come only with the establishment of political parties; for now, the Islamists are seen to have the upper hand in that they effectively campaign as a well-organized, philosophically unified bloc whereas the independents and liberals work in less coordinated smaller blocs or individuals without a similar network of support. Many of our contacts expect that the new parliament will look very similar to the one that was dissolved on March 19, after continued government-parliament dysfunction reached an impasse (Ref B). This expectation is leading some to speculate that an unconstitutional dissolution is a future possibility.

AFTER ELECTIONS - NEXT STEPS

18. (C) Polling stations will be open on May 17 from 0800 - 2000. Announcement of newly elected candidates is expected as soon as all of the ballots are counted, which is predicted to be mid-day May 18. The current Cabinet should resign immediately following the announcement of the results and assume the role of a caretaker government until the formation of a new Cabinet. A new Cabinet will be sworn in by the Amir

before the first session of the new Parliament, which is 14 days after the election results are announced.

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